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by  
*Edwin O. Reischauer*

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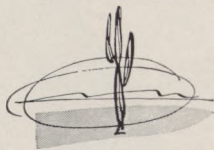
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ANNIE W. RIECKER

1853 - 1937



An Arizona Pioneer, Mrs. Annie W. Riecker was born in Birkenhead, England. She came to Prescott, Arizona, in 1877 with her husband, Paul F. Riecker, an engineer with the U. S. Surveyor General's Office. Her husband was one of the first to survey the Grand Canyon. He also established a number of county lines in Arizona. The family moved to Tucson in 1880. Mrs. Riecker had four children: Fred, Eugene, Edna, and Eleanor. The Annie W. Riecker Lectureship Foundation was established by her daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Riecker Ritchie, with a gift of a \$10,000 endowment to the University of Arizona in 1953.



#### EDWIN O. REISCHAUER

Dr. Edwin O. Reischauer, who gave the fourth annual Annie W. Riecker Memorial Lecture at the University of Arizona on March 19, 1958, was born in Tokyo, the son of an American missionary. An intimate knowledge of Japan and China, research there and in Europe, and far-reaching responsibilities in connection with Far Eastern affairs for the United States government, make him unusually well-qualified to discuss "Our Asian Frontiers of Knowledge." He holds the Bachelor of Arts degree from Oberlin College and the Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Harvard University. Now director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute in Cambridge, Mass., he is the author of numerous scholarly publications and translations, and of several popular books and articles on the Far East.



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# OUR ASIAN FRONTIERS OF KNOWLEDGE

by

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It may seem somewhat quixotic to suggest that there are any significant frontiers to human knowledge today other than those of the natural sciences. Asia as a land mass has been thoroughly explored for many decades. We have been in close contact with its people for an equal period. The frontiers of knowledge, it would seem, swept over such nearby, commonplace fields long ago and are now far beyond them. Today, the only challenging frontiers appear to be distantly removed from simple human matters, deep in the invisible recesses of the atom, far out in inter-stellar space, or even further afield in the realm of pure mathematical speculation.

All the recent clamor about a sense of urgency has, of course, been directed toward the natural sciences — often toward singularly narrow fields within the natural sciences, such as the ability to hurl with a fair degree of accuracy a relatively small package of nuclear materials a few thousand miles. No one would deny the need to insure that no hostile or irresponsible group should achieve marked superiority in dangerous gadgets of this sort, for obviously the chief immediate threat to human society, as we know it, is the unwise use of these scientific instruments of destruction.

It would be a serious mistake, however, to assume, as many Americans have, that our only significant problems today are those relating to the successful application of scientific knowledge to techniques of production or destruction. Even the natural scientist will point out that more important than the work of practical application is that of pure and apparently impractical scientific research, for it is from such pure research that the important new practical steps will eventually emerge.

But there is an even more basic fallacy to the assumption that the fundamental problems facing us today are those involving the practical application of scientific knowledge. Actually our scientific efforts, for all their urgency, deal only with the symptoms of the malady of modern times — not with its causes. Obviously we are not engaged in a life and death struggle with



natural forces themselves. Men passed that stage hundreds of years ago — possibly many thousands of years ago when they first mastered the use of fire, invented the bow and arrow, and developed agriculture. Even the economic problems posed by the present explosive expansion of the world's population could probably be met with ease by a normal rate of scientific progress without any frenetic sense of urgency.

Our most pressing scientific problems are all man-made. That is to say, they do not arise from our natural environment but grow out of unsatisfactory relations between human groups. The demand for a sense of urgency has resulted not from a fear of natural forces but from the fear that other men will use their scientific knowledge unwisely. Even the more mundane scientific problems involving man's livelihood and well-being have been greatly complicated by this same fear of other men, for it is this fear that has drained a large proportion of mankind's energy and wealth into non-productive undertakings. The basic malady, as throughout most human history, is the inability of men to cooperate successfully with each other. A major symptom of the disease is the frantic race to achieve superiority in weapons of destruction. Until the disease itself is cured, we obviously must devote attention to this very dangerous symptom, but a more basic need is to find the causes and cures of the underlying malady.

The complex problems of human society can be approached in a variety of ways — through the techniques of the philosopher, the psychologist, the sociologist, the economist, and the political scientist, and through the geographic and cultural focus of the area specialist. Anthropology, which has been such a distinguished part of the work of the University of Arizona, has thrown great light on the so-called advanced cultures of the world by studying intensively some of the supposedly primitive cultures. No one would deny that the study of the Soviet Union and its Russian inhabitants is a subject of prime importance. But I would maintain that, among all these fields, none is more important than the study of Asia and its peoples, both as a subject in itself and as an aspect of the humanities and the various social science disciplines. Here undoubtedly lies one of the largest, least explored, and most crucial of all the frontiers of human knowledge.

The case for the study of Asia is based in part on its size in human terms. Roughly half the people of the entire world live in geographic Asia. If we use the term, as it is often used, in a looser, cultural sense to indicate the whole non-Western part of the world, then Asia comprises well over half of the world's population. This in recent times has been a relatively weak segment of mankind, and no one would claim that within the next few years Asians might themselves determine the fate of the world. But Asia will undoubtedly continue to be, as it already



has proved during the past two decades, a delicate and dangerously explosive element in the relations between the more powerful segments of mankind. Asia moreover is gaining rapidly in power in its own name. The Japanese during the Second World War and the Chinese Communists in a more limited way during the Korean War gave some indications of this Asian surge to power. It is quite possible that within the next few decades the present tensions between East and West within the Occident will have paled into relative insignificance in the face of the more fundamental tension between the Occident and Asia, and it seems altogether probable that, barring an atomic cataclysm, the relationship between the West and the non-Western two-thirds of the world will prove to be the greatest human problem of the coming century.

The case for the study of Asia, however, is not based entirely on the immediately practical grounds of world tensions. There is another more fundamental argument, which, if I may borrow an analogy from the natural sciences, can be compared to the case for pure research. The source material for our study of the problems of mankind, is of course, human experience itself, and well over half of this source material lies in the non-Western part of the world, the bulk of it in geographic Asia. As we have seen, more than half of the population of the world lies outside the West today, but, if we go back a thousand years, we find that the balance then was more like ten to one in favor of Asia. And the record of human experience is as detailed in many parts of Asia as in Europe; in fact it is very much more detailed in some periods of history and in certain phases of human activity.

To exclude this vast source of prime factual data from our studies of man is like attempting to base one's knowledge of the natural world on the phenomena of some small geographic sector. The scientist limited to a South Seas atoll might come to some very different conclusion about geology and climatology than would one whose sole source of information was Greenland.

Such an analogy, of course, overstates the case. In fact, it can be argued that considerable attention has already been given in the West to Asia and its human record. We do have a rough, over-all knowledge of most of Asia and its past and have delved quite deeply into certain aspects of the subject. For example, the early philosophies and religions of Asia have attracted much attention, as have also some phases of its classical art. The sum total of Western studies of Asia is by no means inconsequential, and much of it has been work of a high order. It has even become fashionable in recent years to include mention of Asia in the broader, more generalized type of scholarly study, and most of those who write on "history" or "civilization" as a whole now pay lip service at least to the still somewhat novel concept that the



West has not had a complete monopoly over these two human products.

And yet, I believe it is safe to say that basically the rich record of human experience in Asia is still being ignored by the Occident. The problem is not merely that we are satisfied with an extremely spotty and superficial knowledge of this sector of human experience, as compared to our much more comprehensive and profound knowledge of the West. The real problem is that we tend to regard Asian experience as merely a source for supplementary materials that can be used to confirm or possibly even amplify the solid truths about mankind already derived from the experience of the Occident.

We remain entirely parochial in our simple assumption that the Mediterranean world, that is the Ancient Orient and then Europe in modern times, forms the central core of human history and that all the rest is purely peripheral and ancillary in nature. We are so smug in this assumption that we do not even bother to state it explicitly. In this regard we are no better than the pre-modern Chinese, who, with certainly as valid reasons, simply took for granted that their civilization was the only one in the world. We are no more willing than the Chinese were a few centuries ago to recognize that other civilizations are as good starting points as our own for an understanding of men and their relationships with one another. The anthropologists and to a lesser extent the sociologists have in their own fields cracked this limiting cultural mold, but for the most part the general concepts and theories about human civilization that are used in the West, both by scholars and the general public, have been derived exclusively from Occidental experience, while the experience of Asians, in so far as it is used at all, is cited merely as supplementary evidence for these supposedly established truths.

Generalizations such as I have been making are of course far easier to state than to prove. All I can hope to do with my very limited knowledge and in the still more limited time we have before us is to give two or three illustrations from my own field of special interest, with the hope that these may suggest to you other examples in your respective fields which may help to substantiate my general thesis.

Since I am basically an historian who deals with East Asia, I hope you will forgive me for limiting my more specific remarks largely to historical theory and to this one part of Asia. For illustrative purposes, however, one geographic area is as good as another, and actually the field of historical theory, while sounding extremely remote and theoretical to American ears, lies at the heart of the most immediate and practical problems of Asia.

Asians realize that they are going through a period of cata-



clysmic change, and the more thoughtful among them — that is, the potential leadership groups — keep groping for the meaning of this painful process. They want a theory of history that will explain and justify their present travail and will help to clarify the way ahead of them. In fact, it is the historical theories in men's minds, more than any other factor under human control, that gives direction to the tremendous transformation of Asia now under way. This situation actually may not be unique to Asia. In this age in which even the philosophers have retreated into narrow specializations in logic and semantics, the historian seems to have inherited the job of being the synthesizer of knowledge about mankind, and it is the theories of the universal historian that are sometimes the closest approach to what might be called guilding philosophies for modern man.

The traditional historical concepts of Asia, which are even more narrowly culture-bound than are our own, have been found to be entirely inadequate to the task of supplying a guiding philosophy in this age of rapid change. Asians instead have seized upon the historical theories of the Occident, and though these have been derived exclusively from the historical experience of the West, Asians are using them to explain phenomena sometimes quite unlike those ever known in Europe, occurring in areas which for the most part have had very different past experiences from the West. As might be expected, the results have been not just intellectually confusing but often disastrous in a much more practical sense.

Take, for example, the mechanistic application of the narrowly Occidental theories of Marxism to conditions and cultures toward which Marx himself had little interest and less understanding. I do not mean to suggest that Marxist theories are all entirely inapplicable to Asia. Marxist insights have contributed to our understanding of the West, and these insights have some, though usually less, validity in Asia. On the whole, however, the tendency of Asians to see the world through Marxist glasses has blurred and distorted their picture of themselves and their problems far more than it has clarified their vision. I would not say that the present problems of Asia derive basically from such misinterpretation of history, but these misinterpretations unquestionably have greatly aggravated some of these problems.

It might be argued that it is precisely in the field of historical theory that Asia is being adequately taken into account in the West today. The work of that great historian, Arnold Toynbee, might be cited as proof of this thesis. With your indulgence for my temerity, I should like to cite Toynbee to prove the contrary. I do not wish to become involved in a discussion of Toynbee's specific theories. Even though I do not agree with all of them, I have far too much awe of his prodigious learning



and respect for the depth of his understanding to wish to challenge him on these grounds. All I mean to say is that, to one whose primary historical interest lies in East Asia, it seems very evident that Toynbee's theories were not derived from his knowledge of the history of that part of the world. They are obviously based on his very much deeper knowledge of the Mediterranean world and have only been applied in a somewhat superficial manner to East Asia.

We can hardly blame Toynbee for having approached the problem in this sequence. The material available to him on East Asian history, particularly in the languages he commands, is much less adequate than the material on Western history. At the same time, I suspect that his approach also derives at least in part from an unconscious assumption that Western history is somehow the human norm and that therefore any pattern that emerges clearly in the West must have universal validity. If he had actually assumed that East Asian historical experience is basically as significant as that of the West, he might have seen in his own presentation a very significant fact which he apparently overlooked but which stands out quite clearly to my more Asia-oriented eyes.

The basic theories of Toynbee seem to me to derive from the classic Western sequence of Greece and Rome, as do so many of the historical theories of the West, especially those that use the biological analogy of the birth, growth, mature hardening, and eventual decay of civilizations. These theories fit the ancient Chinese record smoothly, easily, and usually quite convincingly. The parallels between the contemporaneous sequences of Greece and Rome in the West and Chou and Han in China are quite striking. In fact, the pattern fits ancient China very much better than it does the post-classic West. The pattern fits the medieval and modern West only very loosely at best, and, when Toynbee tries to fasten it on post-classic China and Japan, the attempt begins to degenerate into absurdities.

I am tempted to conclude that the search for meaningful uniformities in history is more successful when pursued horizontally rather than vertically. That is, significant parallels in history are more likely to occur between cultures existing at the same general technological level (as for example between Rome and the Han Empire) than between cultures of different technological levels, even though they share common geographic and racial foundations.

Such a concept, if shown to have some validity, might prove much more helpful to Asians today than the sweeping generalizations, unlimited by time or space, that Marx and Toynbee have devised. It would help Asians to realize where they should look



for possibly significant parallels to their present conditions. They would do well to look for these parallels in the specific experiences of the West or other Asian lands at comparable technological levels and not indiscriminately in a voluminous grab bag of universal historical experience.

If we were to forget Western history long enough to take a steady look at Asian historical experience without our usual preconceptions, we might perhaps emerge with some other new concepts which would not only be useful in interpreting various aspects of Asian history but might also throw new light on the Occident.

No idea is more firmly established in the modern West than the concept of progress; but in China the chief historical theory has been that of simple cyclical repetition without over-all motion. No one, no matter how cynical he may be about man's intellectual and spiritual progress, would deny the usefulness of the Western concept as a generalization about mankind's steadily increasing technological competence. But the Chinese view also has its merits. The Chinese have made their cyclical theory seem a much more comprehensive interpretation of their history than it actually is, simply by tailoring the facts to fit the theory, just as we have often adjusted the facts of our history to prove our assumptions of steady progress in all fields. There is, nonetheless, considerable validity to the Chinese view of a dynastic cycle, as they call it, not as an over-all explanation of Chinese history but as a definite economic-administrative pattern that has often repeated itself.

A careful study of this Chinese historical pattern, I believe, will reveal that it has relevance for the West today. Ever since the West in modern times began to approximate Chinese levels in matters of centralized political administration and bureaucratic organization, certain aspects of this same cycle have been showing up in the West.

A feature of the Chinese cycle, for example, has been the tendency of government, after an initial period of consolidation, to become less efficient, as the organs of government proliferated and the bureaucracy grew in numbers without any commensurate increase in accomplishments. The same phenomenon has shown up in modern Western government and business and has recently been given the facetious name of Parkinson's Law. It is, however, an old and well-recognized aspect of the Chinese dynastic cycle, and Chinese historical experience provides a great deal more data on this phenomenon than we have as yet built up in the West.

Another aspect of the Chinese cycle is the steady growth of the costs of government. The Chinese Empire for more than a



thousand years has been familiar with the inevitably soaring budget. In China the resulting problem was more serious than it has proved in the contemporary West, because it was not coupled with a rapidly growing economy that made possible a corresponding increase in revenue; but the basic fiscal phenomenon has been the same.

Still another aspect of the Chinese cycle has been the steadily expanding defense problem and defense budget. To defend the homeland, the Chinese had to secure the borderlands, and to defend these they had in turn to secure the borderlands beyond them, and thus step by step the defense problem expanded both geographically and financially. The parallels to our own position today are marked. I should not wish to push these parallels to a justification or condemnation of our present foreign policy, but I merely wish to point out that in this, as in many other ways, the patterns of Chinese history find parallels in our own present experience — and that therefore a deeper understanding of China's past might have considerable relevance for us today.

I should not for a moment advocate that we attempt to squeeze modern European or American history into the patterns of the Chinese dynastic cycle. This would be no better than the attempt we have made to force Asian history into our traditional patterns. All I am saying is that an historian who has a thorough understanding of the dynamics of the Chinese administrative cycle might develop some very stimulating new conclusions about recent European and American history.

An even more obvious application of the theories of the dynastic cycle would be to present-day China. I do not at all agree with those Occidental traditionalists who see in the Chinese Communists nothing but a new dynastic start or an atavistic return to China's first great imperial dynasty, the Ch'in, with its obviously totalitarian philosophical notions. On the other hand, it is indeed unfortunate that the Chinese themselves have become so enamored of Occidental concepts of progress — Marxist style — that they seem quite oblivious to the many obvious parallels between Chinese Communism and some of the most deplorable features of the *ancien regime* that they are hoping to destroy.

If we were to take Asian history at all seriously, we might even be able to shake loose from the single most misleading aspect of Western historical theory — that is the assumption that progress is not only inevitable, but is also definitely unilinear. We all *know* that history falls into ancient, medieval, and modern categories. These categories would be all right if they merely indicated time sequences, as their names imply, but they have come to mean much more than this. "Ancient"



means like the early Near East, Greece, and Rome; "medieval" means like Feudal Europe; and "modern" means like the post-Renaissance West. Only a slight variation of this universally accepted pattern brings us that most stultifying of all historical generalizations, the Marxist stereotype, according to which history is an inevitable, unilinear progression from the slave state, through feudalism, to capitalism, and on to the Socialist utopia.

The ancient-medieval-modern division of history is a useful generalization for handling Western history, and even the Marxist theories make some sense in the Occident. But neither stands up if we look at History as a whole, that is at the non-Western preponderance of man's historical experience. Similarities in the ancient stage, as we have seen, may have existed throughout the world, though there is considerable doubt about the Marxist generalization that slavery was the foundation of production at this time. When we come to the medieval-feudal and modern-capitalist stages, however, these Western generalizations break down completely. There are no such stages in most of Asian history.

Let us look at post-classic China for a moment to see how different the pattern is. After a decline and fall of the Han Empire that resembles the collapse of Rome to an extraordinary degree, China succeeded in recreating its old imperial unity, but on a much higher technological level. In place of the pale misshapen shadow of Rome that flitted through European history under the name of the Holy Roman Empire, China recreated its own Rome, bigger, stronger, and richer than ever before. When the so-called dark ages hung over Europe, China was living through one of its culturally most creative periods. By the time feudalism was at its height in Europe, China had developed a highly sophisticated urban society that in many ways was closer to what the West was to know in the nineteenth century than to any earlier phase of our history.

Realizing how badly China and most other Asian countries fit into the Western historical stereotypes, some scholars, particularly those of Marxist background, have devised a separate category — Oriental despotism — to describe these non-Western societies. This is at least a step in the right direction, and I for one applaud Wittfogel when he looks at Europe from the vantage point of this Asia-oriented concept and points out which areas or epochs in the West, such as Rome, Byzantium, and Russia, have shown signs of approximating this non-Western norm.

Only when we accept the fact that Western feudalism, far from being an inevitable part of normal historical progress, was in fact a decidedly peculiar European phenomenon, are we at



last ready for a clear and unbiased reappraisal of the meaning of our own historical experience. Perhaps a good starting point for such fresh thoughts would be whatever non-European experience of feudalism we can find. Our task is made easy by the paucity of examples. Feudalism has indeed been a very unusual human phenomenon. Japan offers the only clear example outside of Europe itself. Fortunately it is an example that is entirely independent of the European experience. Japan lies at the opposite end of the Old World from Europe, and there was not even any remote influence of the feudalism of either of these areas on the other.

We obviously do not have time for a detailed discussion of Japanese feudalism, still less for a consideration of other Asian historical experiences, which would be necessary to prove how unique Japanese feudalism was in Asia and how much closer it was to the experience of medieval Europe than to any phase of Asian history outside of Japan. All I can do is to point out that most of the basic features of European feudalism were present in Japan and they followed each other in somewhat the same sequence. As in Europe, status and function in Japan's feudal society and government were determined largely by heredity and were closely linked to the individual's rights in connection with specific pieces of land — as hereditary cultivator, hereditary controller, or hereditary domanial lord. Relations between different levels of society were hierarchic and personal, depending on individual bonds of loyalty and legal concepts of vassalage. Both society and government were dominated by a virtual caste of hereditary military aristocrats, who made their ethical values and attitudes the norms of society.

One could go on, almost *ad infinitum*, citing parallels between feudal Europe and Japan that contrast sharply with most of the other social, economic and political systems that have been known in either East or West. The parallels could descend to seemingly unimportant details, or they could rise to somewhat dizzy philosophical heights that seem far removed from the more prosaic economic and social foundations of feudalism. One wonders, for example, why the feudal periods of both Europe and Japan should also have been their greatest ages of religious fervor. One also wonders why the religious interests and attitudes in feudal Europe and Japan should have been basically so much alike, even though they were derived from two radically different religions — Christianity and Buddhism — and are bracketed in time by periods in which European and Japanese religious attitudes were quite dissimilar.

It is undoubtedly significant that European and Japanese feudalism occurred at periods of comparable technological achievements. They also came at roughly the same time,



though Japanese feudalism on the whole was a little later and, perhaps because of the relative isolation of Japan from external pressures, evolved a trifle more slowly. The late fifteenth century saw a stage in Japanese feudalism that perhaps corresponds most closely to European feudalism of the twelfth century, which is usually cited as the high point of feudalism in the West. Moreover, Japan, because of the almost total isolation it imposed on itself in the early seventeenth century, was able to preserve a basically feudal political structure into the nineteenth century, long after Europe had abandoned the system. As a result, the latter part of Japan's feudal experience took place at a technological level that was far higher than that of feudal Europe. It is not surprising, therefore, that this late phase of Japanese feudalism revealed possibilities for the efficient centralization of power through feudalism which could not even be guessed at from the European experience.

As can be readily seen even from this brief presentation, Japanese and European feudalism were by no means identical. The differences in detail were many and sometimes significant. Nonetheless, Japanese feudalism remains a striking and most revealing parallel to the feudal experience of the West.

As has been mentioned, the first important conclusion we can draw from our consideration of Japanese feudalism, particularly in its setting in Asian history as a whole, is the obvious fact that feudalism, far from being a common human experience and an inevitable step in human progress, is a most unusual phenomenon. Clearly the Western assumption that classic or slave-state cultures must inevitably give way to a feudal stage in development is nonsense. This happened only at the two geographic extremes of the Old World, and the bulk of humanity went through no such historical experience. It is absurd to insist egocentrically that most of the world somehow fell out of step with history at this point. We should instead search for those factors peculiar to Europe and Japan which might account for the unusual historical development in these two areas.

If we look at our problem first from the Japanese rather than the European point of view, we may gain some new insights as to why feudalism arose at all. The Japanese between the seventh and the ninth centuries had managed to modernize their hitherto relatively primitive land by borrowing much of the higher culture of the Chinese, including a highly centralized bureaucratic political mechanism and a complicated tax and land-owning system. The relative success of the Japanese in this bold attempt is on the whole more surprising than their ultimate failure to maintain these highly centralized political and economic institutions. Their failure grew out of their



fundamental unwillingness to accept certain key features of the Chinese system.

China in the eighth century was developing a fairly egalitarian social system and was perfecting techniques of civil service examinations whereby talent could be recruited for high government office from a rather broad segment of society. The early Japanese, on the other hand, were an aristocratic, tribal people with strong concepts of hereditary rights, and these they held on to even after borrowing the Chinese machinery of government. The two could not be successfully fused into a stable compound.

Japan, however, did not revert to its earlier tribal type of organization. Instead, the Chinese political and landowning system degenerated into feudalism, in which the complex concepts of legal rights and organization derived from the Chinese system merged with the old native emphasis on hereditary authority and the acceptance of the leadership of the local military aristocrat.

What I have just said is a vast oversimplification of this very complicated development, and many might be inclined to dispute my interpretation. I hope, however, that you will accept it simply for purposes of illustration. Assuming that this is a correct picture of the origins of Japanese feudalism, we can then turn our attention to the origins of Western feudalism to see what we may find there that may be similar.

In Europe the tribal Germans became mixed up with the sophisticated political and economic institutions of Rome, not by attempting to borrow them, but in the less commendable process of destroying them. If the Japanese example is valid, the collapsing legal institutions of Rome offer the one necessary ingredient for feudalism, and the aristocratic tribal organization of the Germanic peoples the other. We have already noted how similar were the historical experiences of Rome and the Han Empire; and the early tribal cultures of the northern part of the whole Eurasian land mass, from the Germanic tribes in the West to the early Koreans and Japanese in the Far East, seem to have been very much alike in their aristocratic organization as effective warrior bands. The parallels seem valid enough to deserve careful study.

We might next turn to other parts of the world where aristocratically organized, tribal groups have become involved in one way or another with sophisticated, centralized political and economic institutions. Tribally organized Turkish, Mongol, and Tungusic peoples, for example, repeatedly conquered part or all of China. During the most serious of the barbarian invasions, following the collapse of the Han Empire, the resulting mixture



showed some signs of producing proto-feudal conditions. But even at this time and still more during later periods of barbarian invasions, the tremendous mass of the Chinese population apparently outweighed the tribal invaders too heavily to be permanently affected. The tribesmen and their tribal organizations were gradually absorbed into China, and the centralized bureaucrat state continued.

In Korea the balance between the two forces was more nearly equal. The ancient Koreans, who had much the same aristocratic, tribal organization as the early Japanese, also adopted Chinese political and economic patterns, not only by imitation, as the Japanese did, but also as a result of repeated Chinese conquests of the peninsula. On the whole the Koreans were more successful than the Japanese in making the Chinese institutions work, but for a long time, roughly between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, it looked very much as if the Chinese system in Korea would degenerate into something like feudalism, as it did in Japan. It was only after the thirteenth century that the Chinese centralized pattern won out completely, perhaps because of the close land connections of Korea to China and the very strong political hold China had over the peninsula throughout most of this period.

Such examples — and many more, no doubt, could be found between the Far East and Western Europe — do not invalidate our theories about the origins of feudalism but tend to confirm the assumption that this peculiar system is the product of a rather unusual mixture of cultural forces in the crucible of history. In any case, I trust that you will agree with me on the basic point that feudalism is no inevitable step in human development, and that we would therefore do well to drop the notion that all history is necessarily embodied in our familiar ancient-medieval-modern progression or in the Marxist variant of this scheme.

So much for the origins of feudalism, which may seem at best a rather remote problem today. Let us turn for a moment to the possible results of feudalism, which, as we shall see, involve us today much more directly.

Anyone who looks seriously at Asian history will be struck by the extraordinary fact that Japan, the one Asian country that shared Europe's feudal experience, was also the Asian country that reacted most rapidly and successfully in the nineteenth century to the challenge of a capitalistic, nationalistic, and industrialized West. One wonders at once if there can be any significant causal relationship between these two seemingly unrelated facts. Any close study of Japan's recent history, I believe, will reveal that this causal relationship does in fact exist and



that it throws a great deal of light on the peculiarities of the modern West as well as on Japan, helping to highlight the differences between these two areas and the rest of the world.

We obviously do not have the time to explain in detail the causal relationship between feudalism and the rapidity of modernization in Japan, still less to consider the other factors involved in Japan's modernization. I would not for a moment wish to imply that the feudal background was the sole reason for the speed of Japan's reaction to the West. I can think of at least one other major reason that seems to me as significant, and there are numerous other factors, unrelated to feudalism, which may have been important. But unquestionably the Japanese, emerging as they were from a feudal period, did find it easier to make use of modern Western institutions, which had evolved out of our own feudal past, than did those Asian peoples who had little or no feudal experience behind them.

One obvious way in which the feudal background was an aid in Japanese modernization was through the military orientation of the leadership it had given Japan. The nineteenth century was a period of predatory imperialism, and the challenge of the Western world was posed most crucially on the military front. This challenge the leaders of Japan were better prepared to see and understand than the leaders of the other, less militaristic Asian countries. For example, while the top Chinese leadership, which was essentially civilian, was still playing around with wholly impractical schemes for meeting the military menace of the West, the Japanese leaders saw quite clearly that their only hope was to match the West in ships, guns, and military skills. While even the more progressive Chinese leaders still thought that it would suffice to graft a few Occidental weapons onto the existing Chinese military organization, the Japanese realized that, if they were to equal the West in military power, they would have to scrap their whole feudal military organization and the feudal society on which it was based and start over again on the basis of a citizens' army.

The advantages of the military orientation that feudalism gave Japan may be obvious enough, but the equally significant advantages of the feudal background in industrialization and the economic field in general are more surprising. In fact, it would be reasonable to assume that a centralized, bureaucratic empire like China would have been better prepared to modernize economically than a feudally decentralized country like Japan. But this was definitely not the case. While China seemed incapable of producing the necessary new class of industrial entrepreneurs and floundered helplessly in its efforts to modernize its economy, Japan produced a host of capable entrepre-



neurs at all levels and developed with speed and efficiency a modern capitalistic economy.

When we look below the surface of Chinese political centralization and Japanese feudal division, we find that there were good reasons for this difference in the response of the two countries to the economic challenge of the West in the nineteenth century. The very centralization of power in China and the omnipotence of the central government had always discouraged any entrepreneurial activity that required long-range investments, because an all-powerful government was also likely to be an arbitrary one. Those with capital normally sought quick returns on their money through usury or trade or else put their capital into agricultural land, the one relatively safe type of investment.

Such a situation, which inhibited long-range investments in industrial production, was common throughout Asia, but in China it was made even more extreme by a factor that at first we might think would have had the opposite effect. This was the relatively egalitarian nature of Chinese society. The Chinese had a snobbish disdain for all commercial activity, as did most other Asians, including the feudal Japanese, but they also believed that political leadership, which stood at the top of their social pyramid, should be open to all those who showed superior talents. A family of wealth, regardless of its origin, could gain respectability through the ownership of land and the education of its members, and within a few generations its more brilliant and better educated descendants might reach the highest pinnacle of political power and social prestige through the government bureaucracy. Thus, the centralized bureaucratic state not only discouraged long-range entrepreneurial activities by its arbitrary power but also exercised a positive pull on all those with ambition and ability, away from economic enterprise and toward government service.

The situation in feudal Japan was very different. Here the class lines between the military elite and the common people could not be easily crossed. The peasants, artisans, and merchants had no hope of making themselves or their descendants powerful political leaders or even socially acceptable by the ruling class. If men of ability and ambition from these classes were to excel, it had to be in their own traditional fields of farming, manufacture, or trade, but not in government. And just because they were excluded from political leadership, they compensated by building up ideals of high economic achievement and the acquiring of money as ends in themselves. In other words, these feudal restrictions led them to develop some of the economic drives that Max Weber has attributed



to Europe, not to its feudal background, but specifically to the Protestant ethic. A second look at the Weberian thesis would seem called for.

Feudal rule in Japan was often as arbitrary as that of the centralized government of China, but the barrier between the military ruling class and the commoners worked both ways. If the commoner could not cross it to join the ruling class, he also knew that members of the ruling class would not cross it to enter his own profession. He was relatively secure in his own field of activity. Moreover a society of strict class cleavages produced a much stronger sense of inalienable rights accruing to each specific class than ever developed in the more mobile society of China.

One sees this best in the way capital was invested in Japan in late feudal times. There was less incentive to put capital into land than there was in China, both because landownership, as such, could not bring with it full social respectability and also because other types of investment were relatively safe. The commercial classes naturally put their profits into expanding their businesses, and well-to-do peasants rarely acquired more than five or six of the diminutive plots of land that serve as farmsteads in Japan. Instead they commonly invested their further profits in small local industrial operations, such as little factories for making bean paste, soy sauce, dyes, or textiles. They readily became entrepreneurs of a type that was almost unknown in the rest of Asia.

In this and in many other ways, late feudal Japan was developing a type of economy that might be called proto-capitalistic, despite the feudal political structure. It is therefore not surprising that the Japanese in the second half of the nineteenth century were able to adopt the capitalistic institutions of Europe with ease, while the other Asian peoples found this a much more difficult matter.

These conclusions are of importance in explaining the recent history of Japan, but they are even more significant when we apply them to some of our broad theories about history in general. The whole Japanese experience suggests that the medieval-modern or feudal-capitalist sequence is after all a natural one. That is to say, for those areas that have had feudalism, capitalism would appear to be a normal next step, as Western theories have assumed. But the very fact that capitalism seems to have grown quite naturally out of feudalism in both Europe and Japan should warn us against assuming that capitalism is an inevitable or natural stage in societies which have not known feudalism. Western theories of unilinear historical development may be no more sound regarding the capitalist stage than they are with regard to feudalism. And if neither



feudalism nor capitalism is an inevitable or even common phase in human historical development, then much of the theoretical underpinning of modern Marxism disappears.

I would not maintain that either Communism or Socialism today derive their main strength from the theories on which they were originally based. But unquestionably these theories are an important part of their strength, particularly in Asia, where many people, facing chaotic conditions and mountainous problems, have found solace in the rigid theoretical certainties of Marxism. These Marxist theories have often proved very damaging to American hopes for Asia. It is indeed ironic that we have remained oblivious to Asian history when it contains such effective proof of the fallacy of the Marxist theories that are so prejudicial to American foreign policy in Asia. Our seemingly impractical study of Asian historical patterns, by showing the historical illusions behind Marxism and by producing a more accurate picture of world history, could have very profound practical results.

So much for our very brief and sketchy consideration of the possible significance of the Chinese dynastic cycle and of Japanese feudalism in understanding the West as well as Asia. It has not been my purpose to attempt to convince you of the validity of any of the theories I have put forward. That would require a much more thorough presentation than has been possible in so short a time. I have merely wished to illustrate the ways in which a deeper knowledge of Asia might contribute to an understanding of the development of human society and might throw light on the great problems that mankind faces today. Equally valid illustrations could have been presented from the point of view of the anthropologist, the sociologist, the economist, the political scientist, the philosopher, or even the psychologist. The whole realm of the arts and letters would also prove as rewarding a field for study, for a knowledge of Asian achievements in these fields, though not likely to contribute much to a solution of present world tensions, could contribute greatly to a revitalization in our own society of those things that make life most worth while.

I hope that I have made the case for basic research in the Asian field clear. In the short time that remains, I should like to consider briefly the problem of the successful application of what knowledge we do have about Asia to the solution of practical problems. Here we find a challenging frontier of a quite different sort.

Let us return for a moment to our analogy taken from the natural sciences. There is relatively little problem in the natural sciences in the application of the results of basic research. The validity of a new theory established by the research work



of a few scientists is readily recognized by others; large groups of competently trained men can be assigned to exploiting the theory for purposes of practical application; and the public unquestioningly accepts the results as exemplified by sputniks or new weapons of destruction.

The situation is very different in the field which, by way of contrast to the natural sciences, the Japanese call the "humanistic sciences." In this field no theory can ever be established with the certainty that is commonplace in the natural sciences. Even the most widely held theories will not be accepted by all competent judges, nor are they accepted as being the whole truth even by those who believe in them. Moreover, even when there is general agreement among specialists, a theory cannot be successfully applied to practical problems unless the general public understands and approves what is being done. The average man, recognizing his own ignorance of the natural sciences, is usually willing to accept the opinion of the expert in this field, but, the same man, regardless of his ignorance or, more correctly, in direct proportion to the depth of his ignorance, feels himself an expert on all human matters, simply because of his membership in the human species.

This difference in the attitude of people toward problems in the natural sciences and the "humanistic sciences" does not bother dictatorial governments. In these, policies are established by a small group of leaders and the experts they choose to trust, and the opinions of people in general do not count. In a democracy, however, the unwillingness of the public to accept without question the consensus of experts on human affairs presents grave problems. This is particularly true in a country like ours in which we have translated our strong desires for political equality into a distrust of all unusual knowledge or capacity. Special knowledge of some aspect of human affairs, instead of being accorded special respect, is often considered suspect just because it is not average knowledge.

The result of this situation is that we make effective use of such expert knowledge as we have on human affairs only in those fields in which the general public is reasonably well informed. In domestic matters, general knowledge naturally runs high, because we all live in and are part of the United States. The gap between specialized knowledge and general knowledge is not serious in this field. In foreign affairs, however, the level of general knowledge is naturally much lower, and our use of specialized knowledge is therefore much less effective. We do much better in foreign areas that the American people know relatively well than in areas about which there is not much general understanding. Our record in Europe, for example, is very much better on the whole than our record in Asia, for the



obvious reason that our past history and common basic culture makes Europe more understandable to the average American than is Asia. To put it in other words, our policies in Asia have diverged a great deal more from what would have been advised by those who know Asia best than our policies in Europe have diverged from the consensus of expert opinion on Europe.

This situation naturally makes Asia a much more probable area of disaster for the United States than either domestic problems or our relations with Europe. Indeed, it has shown this tendency toward disaster for us on more than one occasion in the past. I would not deny that the weakness of our position in Asia derives in part from the inadequacy of our so-called expert knowledge, but this inadequacy is compounded by the still lower levels of general knowledge about Asia in this country. This is an extremely dangerous situation and one that obviously needs correction.

Some people might be inclined to tackle the problem by attempting to persuade the average citizen to accept without question the judgment of the experts in Asian matters, but this would be a hopeless undertaking. Nor do I believe that it would be a wise step in the long run, even if it were possible. On the whole, it is much safer to have the average man skeptical about expert opinion than to have him blindly accept whatever the supposed authorities on a subject may say.

A much more practical approach to the problem is to attempt to raise general standards of knowledge about Asia. This will be a slow and tedious process, but it is vital for our future as a nation. In fact, general American understanding of the problems of Asia forms one of the most important frontiers of knowledge, or at least of education, in the whole world today. In this sense the greatest foreign policy frontier this country faces does not lie in Europe or even in Asia but right here, on the campuses of our colleges, in primary and secondary school rooms, and in the forums of public debate.

Why is this so? For the following reasons: Asia is sure to have a large role in determining the nature of human society in the future; and the United States, because of its vast power, will have a large part in determining, either through its stupidity or its wisdom, either through action or inaction, the role that Asia plays; and finally, the way in which the United States exercises its great influence in Asia depends not only on the development of better expert knowledge about Asia but still more on the understanding of the problems of Asia by the American public as a whole. In other words, the degree of general understanding of Asia in this country basically controls our Asian policies; these in turn have a large influence on the eventual outcome in Asia; and the future of Asia will undoubtedly

help determine the future of the whole world. Certainly one of the greatest challenges we as a people face today is to develop adequate knowledge of the non-Western two-thirds of the world in time to help contribute wisely to its future. This indeed is a problem about which we should have a strong sense of urgency.

The glittering world of space ships, rockets, and nuclear explosions presents a great challenge to men's minds, and no one would discount its immediate importance for national survival. The familiar world of Western civilization still offers rich and challenging grounds for intellectual endeavor. But it is probably our Asian frontiers of knowledge which today offer the greatest challenge both as a field of basic research about human society and as a field of general education that requires urgent development.











